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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001107

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT
NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: In wake of brazen killing, Tigers indicate they may want to restart peace talks

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 6-24-03 unclass email

- (B) Colombo 1092, and previous

(U) Classified by Donald Camp, Charge d'Affaires.

Reasons: 1.5 (b, d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: After a meeting in London with the Norwegian facilitators, the Tamil Tigers -- in hedged fashion -- have indicated that they may be willing to restart the peace talks. This news comes in the wake of the brazen killing of a police official on June 23, which was almost certainly perpetrated by the Tigers. Given the problems the peace process has had of late, the news that the Tigers may want to restart the talks is a positive development. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (SBU) TIGER ANNOUNCEMENT: In a seeming softening of its previous hard-line stance, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) organization has indicated that it may be willing to restart peace talks with the Sri Lankan government. (Note: Citing various concerns, the Tamil Tigers pulled out of the talks in late April -- See Ref B.) In comments posted by the pro-LTTE website "TamilNet" late June 23, Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's London-based spokesman, was cited as indicating that the peace talks "will" resume "soon." (Note: The TamilNet article is contained in Ref A.) In remarks that seemed to set conditions for the recommencement of the talks in line with recent Tiger positioning, however, Balasingham was also cited as stating: "If a concrete set of proposals are presented the LTTE will study the framework and suggest improvements. Thereafter, the parties could enter into negotiations to formalize and finalize the envisaged interim administration." In the TamilNet piece, Balasingham also stated that his June 23 meeting with a Norwegian government facilitation team led by Special Envoy Erik Solheim had been "positive" and "constructive."

¶13. (C) NORWEGIAN REACTION: Queried about the TamilNet report, Tomas Stangeland, polchief at the Norwegian Embassy, told us that he had spoken with Special Envoy Solheim who confirmed that the meeting with Balasingham had gone well. Stangeland said the Norwegian team planned to brief GSL officials visiting London about the meeting and decide on next steps after that. (Note: Several high-level ministers involved in peace process issues, including G.L. Peiris and Milinda Moragoda, are in London with PM Wickremesinghe -- See Ref B.) Overall, Stangeland said the TamilNet report seemed to indicate a "softening" in the Tigers' views. That said, Stangeland noted that Balasingham had seemed to hedge his comments about restarting the talks, indicating that the LTTE wanted to see "concrete" plans from the GSL re the setting up an interim structure in the north/east before making a commitment.

¶14. (SBU) BRAZEN SLAYING: Amid the seemingly positive news contained in the TamilNet report, the brazen killing of a police officer in the Colombo area on June 23 was a down note for the peace track. As with numerous other killings that have taken place in Sri Lanka of late, the crime was almost certainly perpetrated by the Tigers.

¶15. (SBU) The details of the June 23 killing were gruesome. According to various reports, the police inspector, Sunil Thabrew, 40, was shot and killed inside a police compound in the city of Dehiwela, which is approximately ten kilometers south of Colombo. The suspected perpetrator of the killing, Sellathurai Kirubakaran, was quickly nabbed at a nearby police checkpoint. The suspect tried to commit suicide by taking a cyanide capsule, but was unsuccessful and is now under police custody. Police believe the suspect, who is Tamil, was an operative of the LTTE. They think that Thabrew, the police official, was targeted because he had been investigating the killing of Tamil informants working for Sri Lanka's military. (Note: Since early this year, there have been over 30 killings of Tamil opponents of the LTTE -- See Ref B. The most

notorious of these slayings occurred on June 14 when a high-level anti-LTTE Tamil politician was gunned down in Jaffna. There are reports that another anti-LTTE Tamil was killed in the east on June 23. Unlike the previous victims, however, Thabrew, the police officer killed on June 23, is believed to have been a Sinhalese Buddhist.)

16. (C) The general reaction to the killing of Thabrew was one of shock and horror. There was copious press coverage of the incident with colored photos of the bloodied victim splashed across the front pages of local newspapers. As is their style, the Tigers did not comment on the attack, although TamilNet had a brief article on the incident. In a June 24 conversation, Kumar Ponnambalam, a Tamil National Alliance MP, told us that he did not think the LTTE had anything to do with it, though he agreed that the matter needed thorough investigation. (Note: Ponnambalam, who is close to the Tigers, has consistently maintained that the LTTE is not involved in the recent spate of killings.) Indian High Commission polchief Taranjit Sandhu told us that he had no doubt that the LTTE was responsible for what happened, especially given the victim's involvement in investigations of previous killings. Sandhu also noted that the taking of a cyanide capsule as was done by the suspect was part of the Tigers' modus operandi.

17. (C) COMMENT: Given the problems the peace process has had of late, the news that the Tigers may want to restart the peace talks is a positive development. Nonetheless, our guess is that it will still take some work by the Norwegian facilitators to find out whether or not the group is really serious. As for the latest killing, the incident was the most shocking of the many that came before it. As the victim was a police official and the crime took place in the Colombo area, a lot of hackles are being raised, with many observers wondering whether it is worth trying to do business with the Tigers. This, no doubt, will put added pressure on the GSL as it tries to re-engage the LTTE. END COMMENT.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

CAMP